

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10 L-03
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R 220833Z AUG 78
FM AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8250
INFO AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA
DIA WASHDC
USCINCEUR VAHINGEN GE

C O N F I D E N T I A L KHARTOUM 3888

DEPT PASS HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: MOPS, SREF, PBOR, ET, SU
SUBJECT: ERITREAN SITUATION

1. DURING SEPARATE RECENT CONVERSATIONS ON OTHER MATTERS
I ASKED SUDANESE ARMED FORCES CHIEF OF STAFF AND ITALIAN
CHARGE WHAT NEWS THEY HAD OF SITUATION IN ERITREA. IN
GENERAL THEIR REMARKS ARE CONSISTENT WITH INFO USG ALREADY
HAS. ETHIOPIAN TROOPS HAVE MOVED SOUTH OF ASMARA IN
DECAMERE/SONGUINETI AREA AND HAVE CAPTURED MAJOR CITIES IN TRIANGLE
BETWEEN TESSENEI, UM HAGGAR AND ASMARA AREAS WHERE ELF WAS DOMINENT.
THUS THEY CONTROL SOUTHERN HALF ERITREAN-SUDAN BORDER AREA.
MOST OBSERVERS HERE EXPECT ETHIOPIANS TO TRY TO ATTACK KEREN NEXT
AND TO ATTEMPT GAIN CONTROL NORTHWEST ERITREA, AN AREA WHERE EPLF
IS IN CONTROL.

2. HOWEVER, SOURCES HERE QUESTION WHETHER THIS CAN BE DONE
EASILY OR SWIFTLY, IF AT ALL. EPLF EXPECTED RESIST
ETHIOPIANS MORE STRONGLY. ITALIAN CHARGE SAID INFO
HE HAS CORROBORATES SUNDAY SUNA REPORTS THAT EPLF
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FORCES NEAR ASMARA HAVE PREVENTED ETHIOPIAN FORCES
FROM MOVING OUT OF ERITREAN CAPITAL. MOREOVER, WELL-
ARMED EPLF FORCES INFLICTED HEAVY CASUALTIES ON
ETHIOPIANS. THUS, IT WILL BE SOME TIME, APPARENTLY,
BEFORE ETHIOPIAN INFANTRY CAN BEGIN MOVE TOWARD
KEREN. HOWEVER, BOTH ITALIAN CHARGE AND CHIEF OF
STAFF SAID THEY ANTICIPATE ETHIOPIAN BOMBING OF KEREN.

3. OBSERVERS HERE FORESEE LONG PERIOD OF INSTABILITY IN ERITREA AS ETHIOPIANS FAIL TO DISLODGE ERITREAN FORCES FROM COUNTRYSIDE WHILE LATTER ENCIRCLE AND HARRASS ETHIOPIAN-HELD CITIES. MEANWHILE APPEARS MAJOR EFFORT WILL BE MADE BY ETHIOPIANS TO TAKE AND BY EPLF TO DEFEND KEREN.

4. CHIEF OF STAFF CONFIRMED THAT SUDANGOV CONTINUES TO SUPPORT ERITREANS WHILE HOPING THAT NEGOTIATIONS BETWEEN ERITREANS AND EPMG CAN SOMEHOW BE BROUGHT ABOUT. HE ADMITTED THAT PROSPECT OF UNSTABLE, RADICAL INDEPENDENT ERITREA WAS NOT ATTRACTIVE TO SUDANGOV, BUT DOMESTIC PUBLIC OPINION AND POLICIES OF KEY ARAB STATES WILL REQUIRE SUDAN TO CONTINUE SUPPORT FOR ERITREANS. CHIEF OF STAFF DID STRESS, AS HE HAS IN PAST, THAT QUOTE NOT ONE SINGLE SUDANESE SOLDIER IS IN ETHIOPIA UNQUOTE.

5. REGARDING ERITREAN REFUGEES, WE WERE NOT ABLE TO LEARN WHETHER LARGE NEW FLOWS ARE CONTINUING TO ARRIVE IN SUDAN. CHIEF OF STAFF SAID MOST REFUGEES ARE ELDERLY, SICK, CHILDREN OR WOMEN AND THAT SUDANGOV REMOVING THEM FROM BORDER AREA TO KHASHM AL-QIRBA.

6. COMMENT: FROM HERE IT LOOKS AS THOUGH FIGHTING WILL CONTINUE IN ERITREA FOR LONG TIME WITH NEITHER SIDE
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GAINING UPPER HAND. MEANWHILE, SUDANGOV WILL FEEL COMPELLED SUPPORT ERITREANS AND WILL HAVE TO PROVIDE SUSTENANCE TO SOMEWHERE BETWEEN 150,000 AND 200,000 REFUGEES.
BOGOSIAN

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED HORN OF AFRICA COLLECTIVE.

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